

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 7 August 2012 starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

J Hill	J Rogerson
T Hill	R E Sherras
K Hind	D T Smith
S Hore	N Walsh
K Horkin	A Yearling
A Knox	

In attendance: Director of Resources, Director of Community Services and the Head of Revenues and Benefits.

211 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Elms, S Hirst and R Thompson.

212 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

213 MATTERS ARISING

a) Minute 78 – Appointment of Economic Development Working Group.

RESOLVED: That this working group consist of Councillors E M H Ranson, S Hirst, S Hore, G Mirfin, K Horkin, A Yearling and J Rogerson.

b) Minute 82 – Village Amenity Grants

The Director of Resources gave an update on how these grants were progressing. She reported that there had been a large number of applications received and these would be evaluated by the end of August with a report being submitted to the next meeting of this Committee in September.

c) Minute 96 – Compulsory Purchase Order - 2 Barnacre Road, Longridge

The Chairman reported that the landowner had recently submitted a planning application in relation to this site. A discussion took place regarding whether a compulsory purchase order could still proceed once a planning application had been submitted. The Chairman was concerned that there were unnecessary delays with the CPO process and

he asked the Director of Community Services to instruct officers to proceed with the CPO.

214 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors A Knox, J Rogerson, N Walsh and A Yearing all declared an interest in item 7 – Concurrent Function Grants. Councillor Knox requested that Councillors be given a briefing by officers on the new rules in relation to standards and Councillor interests.

215 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

216 LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

The Director of Resources referred to Minute 91 of Committee dated 12 June and further updated Committee on changes to Council Tax benefit and how these would affect Ribble Valley Borough Council and its Council Tax payers. She outlined the three options open to the Council and explained each option's pros and cons.

- 1) Accept the default scheme (do nothing).
- 2) Reduce Council Tax discounts and exemptions.
- 3) Reduce Council Tax support.

She also reported that, despite a number of meetings between the County Council and Lancashire districts attempting to adopt a countywide district policy, this had proved impossible mainly due to the differences between districts.

Having discussed the matter at Budget Working Group, the Council were recommending a position which was a mixture of options 2 and 3 as their preferred solution to deliver the savings required.

She also informed Members that the County Council had already indicated that in future, the income from second homes raised in Ribble Valley would no longer be returned to the Council via the Local Strategic Partnership to spend in our area. One option would be that this funding could be utilised to part fund the cost of Council Tax support.

She commented that in her opinion the scheme should ideally mirror the existing Council Tax benefit scheme as closely as possible and any variations to this should be kept as simple and straightforward as was possible, certainly in year 1. She set out the main principles which it was suggested would form the basis of a new Ribble Valley Council Tax support scheme.

Principle 1 – the income raised from the existing Council Tax on second homes should be used to subsidise the Council Tax support scheme thus contributing to those Ribble Valley residents who were vulnerable and/or in receipt of low incomes.

Principle 2 – all working age claimants should pay something.

Principle 3 – the most vulnerable claimants should be protected by retaining the existing allowance built into the existing system.

The Borough Council had consulted its three main authorities – Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Constabulary and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service. Of those three, both the County Council and the Police opposed the Borough Council's chosen option with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service supporting the Council's position. The next step was to consult all benefit claimants and other stakeholders on the Council's proposals.

Members then discussed the report and the respective positions of the Borough Council and the County Council in some detail.

RESOLVED: That

1. Committee note the progress being made on this issue; and
2. delegate to the Director of Resources in consultation with the Budget Working Group the draft scheme for local Council Tax support and a scheme of public consultation.

217 CONCURRENT FUNCTION GRANTS

The Director of Resources reported on the allocation of Concurrent Function Sector Grants for 2012/2013.

She reminded Members that this scheme had been approved a number of years ago and gave grant assistance to those parishes and town councils which provided services in their areas, which elsewhere were provided by the Borough Council. An annual revenue budget allocation had been approved of £20,000. The Council agreed to support Parish and Town Councils net revenue expenditure in relation to the following concurrent functions:

- Burial grounds
- Bus shelters
- Footpaths
- Footway lighting
- Litter collection
- Dog waste bins
- Parks and play areas

Committee were reminded that support was limited to 25% of eligible net revenue expenditure in the previous year subject to the overall costs to this Council not exceeding the £20,000 budget allocation.

19 applications had been received – revenue expenditure totalling £57,113 in total, which based on a grant rate of 25% of the total amount of grant payable would equate to £14,278 which was within the budget provided.

In accordance with the scheme, the grant would normally be paid in two equal instalments, however, due to the level of each individual grant, Members may choose to recommend grant payments in a single instalment in order to reduce the level of administration.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the allocation of grants as proposed in the report; and
2. agree to the payment of the approved grants in a single instalment rather than two instalments.

218 NNDR WRITE OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits sought Committee approval to write off certain NNDR debts.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £1,619.31 of NNDR debts where it had not been possible to collect the payments due.

219 CAPITAL OUTTURN 2011/2012

The Director of Resources sought Committee approval for the slippage of capital schemes from the 2011/2012 financial year to the 2012/2013 financial year and to review the final outturn on the capital programme for 2011/2012 for this Committee.

The capital programme for Policy and Finance Committee consisted of six schemes; these were a combination of new schemes approved as part of the capital programme in March 2011 and additional approvals.

Overall, 77% of the revised estimate had been spent. However, this included the capitalisation of performance reward grant expenditure at the end of the financial year, which was not included in the estimates. When this spend was excluded, the comparison to revised estimates was reduced to 38%.

This variance was due almost entirely to the slippage of the Gallery and Tourist Information remodelling scheme and also the customer facing service remodelling scheme.

For this Committee, there were three schemes that were identified as slippage which would move into financial year 2012/2013; these are customer facing service remodelling - £68,100; Contact Centre customer relationship - £3,900; and Platform Gallery/Tourist Information remodelling - £24,280 giving a total slippage of £96,280.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to the request for slippage as shown in the report and approve the slippage of £96,280 into the 2012/2013 financial year.

220 OVERALL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2011/2012

The Director of Resources gave details of the capital programme outturn for all Committees for the year ending 31 March 2012.

During the year the Council spent £540,969 on capital scheme – the main areas of expenditure included:

- Longridge Activity Play Area
- Replacement of customer relationship management system
- Replacement of the Local Land Charges system
- Renovation and Disabled Facilities Grants

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

221 CAPITAL MONITORING 2012/2013

The Director of Resources provided Committee with information relating to the progress of the approved capital programme for the current financial year. Slippage from the previous year was also reported.

In total, two new schemes had been approved at the meeting of Special Policy and Finance Committee and Full Council. This gave a total planned capital spend for this Committee in the current year of £125,000. In addition, not all planned expenditure for last year had been spent. This amounted to £96,280.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

222 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2012/2013

The Director of Resources submitted a progress report of the approved capital programme for the first quarter of this financial year.

In total, 12 schemes had been approved for the 2012/2013 financial year, which included budgets for five schemes that were removed from 2011/2012 at the revised estimate stage. This made a total planned capital spend for the current year of £938,820 which was shown as Annex 1.

In addition, not all planned expenditure for last year was spent. The balance of this had been transferred into this financial year. The schemes affected were also shown and totalled £273,440. This gave a total approved budget for this year of £1,212,260.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

223 REVENUE OUTTURN 2011/2012

Committee considered a report on the Revenue Outturn for Committee for 2011/2012. The report highlighted an overall under spend of £713,190. After

allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves, this under spend was reduced to £48,289.

The report also highlighted some of the significant factors and explanations were given for these differences.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

224 OVERALL REVENUE OUTTURN 2011/2012

Committee considered a report on the Overall Revenue Outturn for the year ending 31 March 2012. The Council had made a surplus of £168,000 during the year compared with the revised estimate of a deficit of £26,000 and the original estimate of a deficit of £186,000.

The Director of Resources highlighted the most significant variations between actual expenditure and the budget. She also explained in some detail, the Council's earmarked reserves.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

225 REVENUE MONITORING 2012/2013

Committee considered a report which informed them of the position for the first three months of the current year's revenue budget as far as this Committee was concerned.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

226 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2012/2013

The Director of Resources presented her report on the revenue budget for the current financial year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

227 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2012/2013

Committee considered a monitoring report on the Treasury Management activities for the period 1 April 2012 to 30 June 2012. Details included in the report were borrowing requirements, investments, prudential indicators and approved organisations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

228 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented his report to Committee. The report covered the following areas:

- National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR)

- Council Tax
- Sundry Debtors
- Housing Benefit performance
- Housing Benefit fraud
- Housing Benefit overpayments

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

229 RECEPTION REMODELLING SCHEME – PROGRESS REPORT

Committee received a progress report from the Director of Community Services in relation to the reception remodelling scheme in the Council offices.

The report emphasised the good progress which had been made in relation to these improvements and included a range of measures which had been included as follows:

- The relocation of the payments area
- The creation of a customer service area
- The construction of a number of interview rooms
- The addition of a public Intranet area
- The relocation of the Contact Centre

As a result of the increased facilities on level B, a decision had been made to close the reception on level C. This therefore gave the potential to reconfigure the reception area at level C and the preferred option was to retain the interview room and convert the surrounding space into a 'break-out area'. As a result of careful design, specification and planning, the projected cost had been kept to £92,000. The residual budget inclusive of the remaining contingency was therefore £8,000.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

230 CLITHEROE FOOD FESTIVAL RDPE BID

Committee received an update of the Food Festival bid submission to the Rural Development Programme for England. The RDPE bid in its current form had been unsuccessful. However, discussions with RDPE representatives at both LCC and DEFRA had indicated that this position was primarily as a result of certain EU eligibility rules in connection with the 2012 event and that a more positive attitude had been taken in the bid to proposals to develop and expand future festival events and activities which could support economic growth.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

231 OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT 2011/2012

Committee received a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services outlining six cases which had been referred to the Local Government

Ombudsman over the past 12 months. The six cases referred for investigation had been determined as follows:

Two were not enough evidence for fault,
Four had not or minor injustices.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.37pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Jane Pearson (414430).